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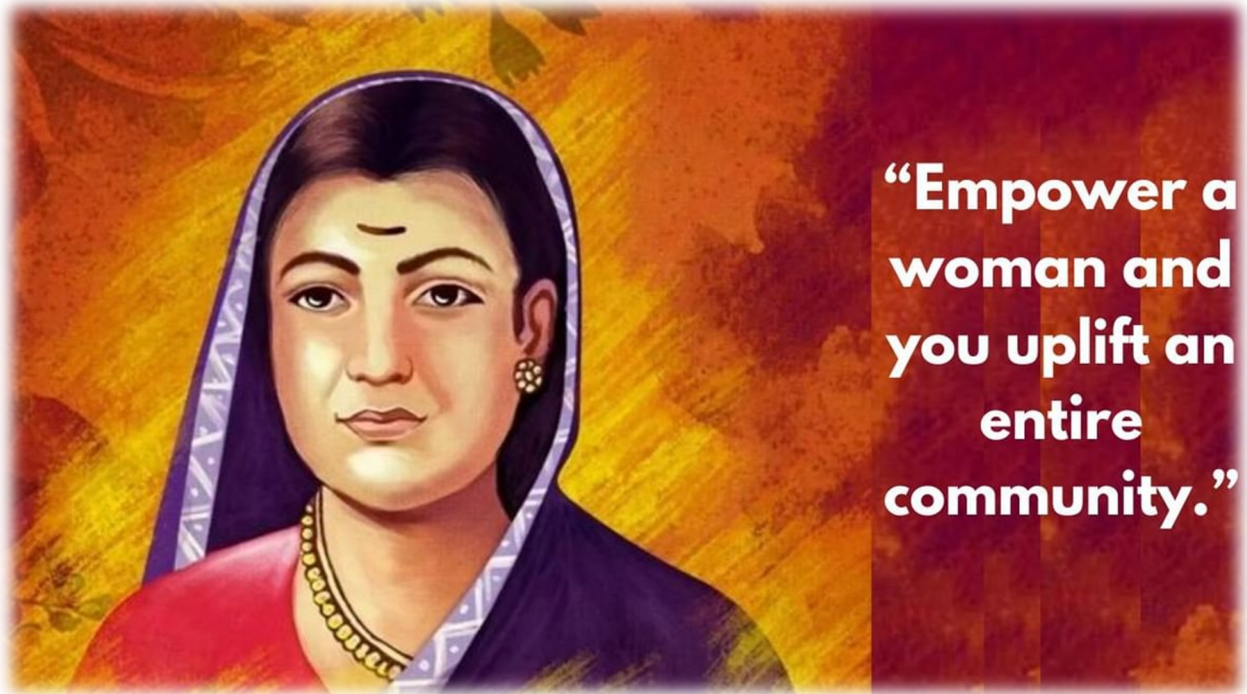
Greatest Of All Times

*globally selected
PERSONALITIES*

ISBN:978-81-982954-4-6

Compiled by:
Prof Dr S Ramalingam

3 Jan 1831 <::><::><::> 10 Mar 1897



**“Empower a
woman and
you uplift an
entire
community.”**



Na Subbureddiar 100 Educational Trust

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www.nasubureddiar100.in

3 Jan 1831



10 Mar 1897

The Mother of Indian Feminism

The Story of Savitribai Phule

The Mother of Indian Feminism

{The first Female Teacher in India}

To know her, kindly visit the Web Link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKQIpDDi7xQ>

In 19th century India, amidst societal constraints, Savitribai Phule emerged as a revolutionary figure. This video chronicles the extraordinary journey of the Mother of Indian Feminism, who championed education, equality, and women's rights. Born in 1831, Savitribai's life took an unconventional turn at a young age. Despite societal norms, she defied limitations and became the first female teacher in India. Facing hostility and attacks, her unwavering spirit led her to open India's first school for girls in 1848, alongside her husband Jyotirao Phule. Savitribai's fight for social justice extended beyond education. She established shelters for destitute women, widows, and child brides, offering them refuge and education. Her relentless efforts aimed at eradicating harmful practices like infanticide and the shaving of widows' heads. A pivotal figure in the Satyashodhak Samaj (Truthseekers' Society), Savitribai challenged the caste system and advocated for social equality. Her legacy continues to inspire generations, making her a beacon of hope for those striving for a just and equitable world.

Savitribai Phule

[3 Jan 1831 – 10 Mar 1897]

*On her 194th Birth Anniversary [3 Jan 2025],
a look at the life of Savitribai Phule,
India's first woman teacher.*

Savitribai Phule was a Maharashtrian poet, educator, and social reformer. She significantly contributed to the advancement of women's rights in India.

She and her husband significantly contributed to the advancement of women's rights in Maharashtra and in India. She is credited with founding the feminist movement in India. In Pune, near Bhide Wada, Savitribai and her husband established one of the first modern Indian girls' schools in 1848. She campaigned to remove caste and gender prejudice and unfair treatment of individuals.

She made significant efforts to educate and emancipate child widows, advocated for widow remarriage, and ran a campaign against child marriage and sati pratha.

Savitribai and Jyotirao had no children of their own. They adopted Yashwantrao, a son born to a Brahmin widow. When Yashwant was about to get married, no one was willing to give him a girl because he was born to a widow. Hence Savitribai arranged his marriage to her organization's worker Dynoba Sasane's daughter in February 1889 probably.



Statues of Jyotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule, at Aurangabad in Maharashtra

Some Important Facts

1. Savitribai Phule was born on January 3, 1831, in Naigaon village of Maharashtra. She was the eldest daughter of Lakshmi and Khandoji Neveshe Patil. At the tender age of nine, she was married to Jyotirao Phule, who was thirteen years old at the time and one of the most famous social reformers of Maharashtra.
2. Savitribai, **known as the country's first revolutionary feminist**, learnt reading and writing. After learning these skills, she began teaching girls in Maharwada in Pune.
3. Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule started India's first school for girls at Bhide Wada in 1848. The curriculum included mathematics, science, and social studies and was based on western education. Despite resistance from society, by 1851 Phule was running 18 schools for children of different castes, with a strength of 150 girls. They also established two educational trusts - the Native Female School, Pune, and the Society for Promoting the Education of Mahars, Mangs, and others from downtrodden castes.
4. **In 1852, the British government acknowledged the great work of the Phule family in the field of education and honored Savitribai by naming her the best teacher.**
5. In 1863, Jyotirao and Savitribai began Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha, India's first home prohibiting infanticide, helping pregnant Brahmin widows and rape victims. Savitribai also fought against dowry and other oppressive social customs.
6. Savitribai organized a barbers' strike in both Mumbai and Pune to demonstrate their opposition to the practice of shaving the heads of widows.
7. Savitribai Phule wrote two books, Kavya Phule in 1854 and Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar in 1892, which are collections of her poems.
8. Savitribai and her husband, who had no children of their own, adopted a boy named Yashwantrao.

Savitribai and her adopted son Yashwant, opened a clinic to treat those affected by the worldwide Third Pandemic of the bubonic plague when it appeared in the area around Nalasopara in 1897. The clinic was established at stern outskirts of Pune, in an area free of infection. Savitribai died a heroic death trying to save the son of Pandurang Babaji Gaekwad. Upon learning that Gaekwad's son had contracted the Plague in the Mahar settlement outside of Mundhwa, Savitribai Phule rushed to his side and carried him on her back to the hospital. In the process, Savitribai Phule caught the Plague and died at 9:00pm on 10 March 1897.



The teacher at the age of 17!
(The first Indian Woman Teacher)

"Imagine yourself as a little girl in the year 1848, belonging to the Dalit-Bahujan, sitting in a classroom among many girls similar to you and a saree clad woman walks in and announces she is your teacher. Being in a class where you couldn't have imagined yourself are ready to get that education which otherwise was prohibited and, in an age, where women as a teacher was even more unlikely, cannot be described."

*In 1852, the British government acknowledged the great work and honoured Savitribai by naming her **THE BEST TEACHER.***



Memorial at Pune

The Savitribai Phule Memorial at Mahatma Phule Peth, Pune

<https://kimaya-thealchemy.weebly.com/savitribaiphulememorialpune.html>

Built as a memorial to the nineteenth century social reformers Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule this memorial built by the Pune Municipal Corporation is a 40,000 square foot complex dedicated to the cause of women and their emancipation. Savitribai started one of the first schools for women in the orthodox and unfavorable environment of 19th century Pune. An auditorium to seat 500 people, a library, a gymnasium, a computer section and a creche are provided besides a gallery showing the couples' work in their lifetime, a conference hall and a residential wing are all arranged around a central courtyard where the sculptures are yet to be installed.







(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)

University of Pune renamed

<http://www.unipune.ac.in/>

The state cabinet of Government of Maharashtra cleared the higher and technical education department's proposal of renaming University of Pune as Savitribai Phule Pune University.

Renamed in 2015.





About Savitribai Phule Pune University



“The University stands for humanism and tolerance, for reason, for adventure of ideas and for the search of truth. It stands for the forward march of the human race towards even higher objectives. If the universities discharge their duties adequately then it is well with the nation and the people.”

- Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru
First Prime Minister of India

These words of **Jawaharlal Nehru** embody in them the guiding principle of Savitribai Phule Pune University. Established in 1949, the University has since become one of the leading centers for research and teaching in the country. The 411 acre campus is located in the North Western part of Pune. The placid environs and state of the art facilities provide it's numerous students with an ideal atmosphere to pursue research in various areas of Science, Arts, Commerce and Languages. The University houses 40 departments which provide a wide array of academic programs. Though a young centre, the University has made a significant impact in various areas of research and teaching, and continues to strive for excellence.

The Savitribai Phule Pune University (formerly known as University of Poona) was established on 10th February 1949 under the Poona University Act, passed by the Bombay Legislature in 1948. In the same year, Dr. M. R. Jayakar assumed office as the first vice chancellor of the University.

Shri B.G.Kher, Chief Minister and Education Minister, Govt. of Bombay, took a keen interest in setting apart a beautiful campus for the University. As a result of his efforts, a campus extending over 411 acres was allocated to the University in early 1949, on lease of 999 years without any premium and payment of nominal lease rent of ₹ One per annum. Payment of certain taxes such as N.A. Tax etc have also been waived.

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Savitribai Phule

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savitribai_Phule

Savitribai Jyotirao Phule



Bust of Savitribai Phule.

Born	3 January 1831 Naigaon, Bombay Presidency, Company India (present-day Maharashtra, India)
Died	10 March 1897 (aged 66) Poona, Bombay Presidency, British India (present-day Pune, Maharashtra, India)
Alma mater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Normal School, Poona^[1] Teachers Training Program, Ahemednagar
Occupation(s)	Teacher, activist, social reformer
Era	1831- 1897 ^[2]
Organization	Satya Shodhak Samaj ^[3]
Known for	Girl's education , ^[3] Women's emancipation ^[3]
Notable work	• <i>Bavankashi Subhodh Ratnakar</i> ^[4]
Spouse	Jyotirao Phule

Savitribai Phule was one of the first female teachers in India, a social reformer, and a poet. Along with her husband, Jyotiba Phule, in Maharashtra, she played a vital role in improving women's rights in India. She is considered to be the pioneer of India's feminist movement. She strived to abolish discrimination and unfair treatment of people based on caste and gender. She and her husband were pioneers of women's education in India. They started their first school for girls in 1848 in Pune at Tatyasaheb Bhide's residence or Bhidewada.

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Legacy



Bust of Savitribai Phule in Pune

Savitribai Phule's legacy lives on today; her work for girl's and women's education is hugely respected.

- Along with [B. R. Ambedkar](#) and [Annabhau Sathe](#), Phule has become an icon in particular for the backward classes. Women in local branches of the Manavi Hakk Abhiyan (Human Rights Campaign, a [Mang-Ambedkarite](#) body) frequently organize processions on their Jayanti (birthday in [Marathi](#) and other Indian languages).
- [Pune City Corporation](#) created a memorial for her in 1983.
- On 10 March 1998 a stamp was released by [India Post](#) in honour of Phule.
- Savitribai's birthdate, 3 January, is celebrated as *Balika Din* (lit. 'Girl child day') in the whole of Maharashtra, especially in girl's schools.
- In 2015, the University of Pune was renamed as [Savitribai Phule Pune University](#) in her honour.
- On 3 January 2017, the search engine [Google](#) marked the 186th anniversary of the birth of Savitribai Phule with a [Google doodle](#).

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Quotable QUOTES

<https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/savitribai-phule-quotes-1704276920-1>

Famous Savitribai Phule Quotes

Savitribai Phule and her unwavering commitment towards education is of no comparison. She firmly stood against all social evils and kept the foundation for the first women's school of India. Check out her most famous quotes in this article to inculcate all righteous deeds for a better tomorrow.



Best & Famous Savitribai Phule Quotes

- Education is the path to liberation and empowerment."
- "Women's rights are not a privilege but a fundamental aspect of human rights."
- "In educating women, we educate generations and shape a just society."

- "Justice is not served until it reaches the last woman standing in the queue."
- "Let knowledge be the beacon that dispels the darkness of ignorance."
- "The true measure of progress is the status of women in society."
- "A society that neglects the education of women denies itself half its potential."
- "Empower a woman, and you uplift an entire community."
- "Social justice is achieved when the most marginalized are heard and uplifted."
- "Education is the key that unlocks the doors of opportunity for every individual."
- Laziness is a symptom of poverty. It is the enemy of knowledge, wealth, and honour and the lazy person gets none of it.
- Education is the great equaliser and it will take us out of our caves.
- A woman without education is like a banyan tree without roots or leaves; she cannot provide for her children and stay alive herself.
- The lack of learning is nothing but gross bestiality. It is through the acquisition of knowledge that (he) loses his lower status and achieves the higher one.
- We shall overcome and success will be ours in the future. The future belongs to us.
- I believe that education is the key to every woman's liberation.
- Awaken, arise, and educate. Smash traditions, liberate minds, and transform society."
- "All gets lost without knowledge, we become animals without wisdom."
- "Sit idle no more, go, get education. End the misery of the oppressed and forsaken."
- "If you have no knowledge, have no education, and you yearn not for the same, you possess intellect but work not on the same, how then can you be called a human being?"
- "If you educate a man, you educate an individual. But if you educate a woman, you educate an entire family and, eventually, a nation."
- "Caste and religion should not be the criteria for determining one's worth. Education should be the only yardstick."
- "The pen is mightier than the sword. Education is the greatest weapon to eradicate social evils."
- "Teach a girl, empower a generation. Empower a boy, and you educate an individual."

- Strive for a society where the birth of a girl is celebrated as much as that of a boy."
- "Question the unjust, challenge the oppressors, and fearlessly fight for your rights.
- "Empathy is the foundation of social justice. Understand the pain of others, and work towards alleviating it."
- "The true measure of progress lies in the upliftment of the downtrodden and the marginalized."
- "You have started the benevolent and welfare work for the poor and the needy. I also want to carry my share of the responsibility. I assure you I will always help you. I wish the godly work will be helped by more people."
- "No matter what you do, you will be called a feminist. It's just a way of life."
- "Women are not born to be conquered, they are born to be respected."
- "Women are not only forced to work at home and on the farm, they can do a better job than men."
- "If you want to make a woman happy, give her freedom and education."
- "A strong, educated woman can build a civilized society, so she should also have the right to education."
- "Raising a daughter before marriage so that she can easily differentiate between good and evil."
- "There is a serious lack of female literacy in the country because the women here have never been allowed to be freed from slavery."
- "Catch ignorance, hold it, hold it tight, strike it, and take it out of your life."
- "The problem with a book is that it takes so long to read."
- "The woman who has a mind of her own has a husband who is not worth having."
- "If you want to learn how to think, read books. If you want to learn how to act, watch acting."

<https://www.news9live.com/lifestyle/travel/guru-shikhar-dattatreya-swami-cave-temple-mount-abu-2772757>

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Life Sketch of Savitribai Phule

Timeline

<https://velivada.com/life-sketch-of-savitribai-phule-timeline/>

"Savitribai Phule (1831-97), struggled and suffered with her revolutionary husband in an equal measure, but remains obscured due to casteist and sexist negligence. Apart from her identity as Jotirao Phule's wife, she is little known even in academia. Modern India's first woman teacher, a radical exponent of mass and female education, a champion of women's liberation, a pioneer of engaged poetry, a courageous mass leader who took on the forces of caste and patriarchy certainly had her independent identity and contribution. It is indeed a measure of the ruthlessness of elite-controlled knowledge-production that a figure as important as Savitribai Phule fails to find any mention in the history of modern India. Her life and struggle deserve to be appreciated by a wider spectrum, and made known to non-Marathi people as well," writes Braj Ranjan Mani.

Here we present life-sketch of Savitribai Phule. In case we have missed any important event from the life of Savitribai Phule or have made any mistake while recording any event, let us know in the comments section and we will try to update the timeline. Alternatively, you can submit further information [here](#).

Default Timeline

1831

1831

Birth of Savitribai Phule



Savitribai Jyotirao Phule was born on January 3, 1831 at Naigaon, about 50 km from Pune. She was the eldest daughter of mother Lakshmi and father Khandoji Neveshe Patil.

1840

1840

Marriage with Jyotirao Phule



As was the practice then, at the age of nine, she was married to twelve-year-old Jyotirao Phule in 1840. Savitribai and Jyotirao had no children of their own but they adopted Yashwantrao, a son born to a widowed Brahmin.

1841

1841

Started Education



Shortly after the marriage to Jyotiba Phule, education of Savitribai Phule started. Impressed by her thirst for learning, Savitribai's husband, Jyotirao Phule, taught her to read and write. Becoming fond of teaching, Savitribai trained at Ms Farar's Institution in Ahmednagar.

1846

1846

Passed Examinations



Passed third and fourth year examination from a normal school.

1847

1847

Started School in Maharwada

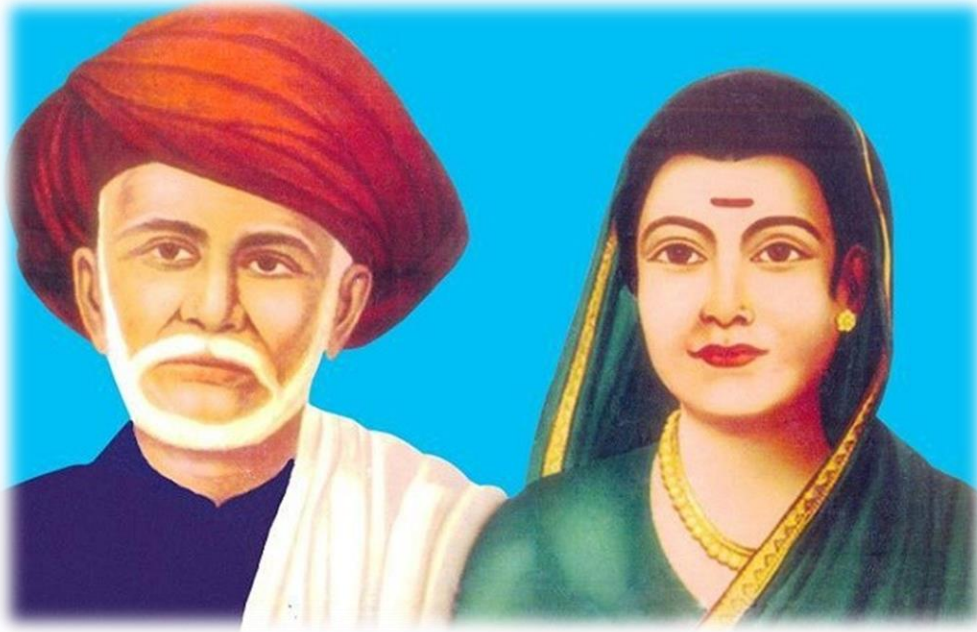


Savitribai Phule along with Sagunabai started school in Maharwada on 1st may 1847, initially 8-9 girls were enrolled but within year strength reached to 40-45.

1848

1848

Started India's First School for Girls



Country's first school for girls was started at Bhide Wada in Pune. On 1st Jan. 1848, India's first school for girls was started at Bhide Wada in Pune by Mahatma Jotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule. The present condition of that first school for girls is miserable because of the lack of interest from subsequent governments in preserving the Dalit-Bahujan heritage. The condition of Bhide Wada where first lady teacher of the nation Savitribai Phule taught along with Fatima Begum! Thanks to Brahmin-Bania run governments.

First Woman Teacher & First Woman Headmistress!



India's first school was started at Bhide Wada in Pune by Phule couple, Savitribai Phule became not only the first woman teacher but Savitribai was nominated as India's first lady headmistress in 1st Jan 1848.

1849

1849

Life At School & Opposition of Brahmins



Life of Savitribai Phule as a teacher in the school at the time when upper caste orthodox people used to look down wasn't easy and many times they used to pelt stones and throw dung on her. The young couple faced severe opposition from almost all sections. Savitribai was subject to intense harassment every day as she walked to the school. Stones, mud and dirt were flung at her as she passed but Savitribai Phule faced everything courageously.

1849

Thrown Out of Their House



Savitribai Phule and Jotiba Phule's work of educating downtrodden and girls infuriated many Brahmins of that time and because of the fears of attacks from orthodox Brahmins, Jyotiba Phule's father was afraid. In 1849, both Savitribai Phule and Jotiba Phule were thrown out of their home.

1849

First School For Shudra and Ati-Shudra



After being thrown out of their home, Savitribai Phule and Jotiba Phule started school for adults at Usman Sheikh's Wada in Pune for educating Shudra and Ati-Shudra community. Savitribai taught at this school along with the **first Muslim woman teacher of India, Fatima Sheikh.**

1850

1850

Inspiring Students



Savitribai Phule is also said to have inspired a young student to ask for a library for the school at an award ceremony instead of gifts for herself. She inspired the young girls to take up painting, writing, and other activities. An essay written by a young girl, Mukta Salve, at that time became the face of Dalit literature and Dalit Feminism. Parent-teacher meeting was conducted at regular intervals to aware the parents about the importance of education and to encourage their children to attend the schools regularly.

1850

Foundation of RTE and Mid-day Meal Schemes



You might wonder the Right to Education Act, midday meal schemes are a modern-day concept but Savitribai Phule and Jotiba Phule set the stage for it almost 170 years back by giving stipends to children to reduce the dropout rate in schools. They took initiatives to reduce malnutrition in children by taking care of the health of each and every child in school.

1851

1851

Running 3 Schools at a Time

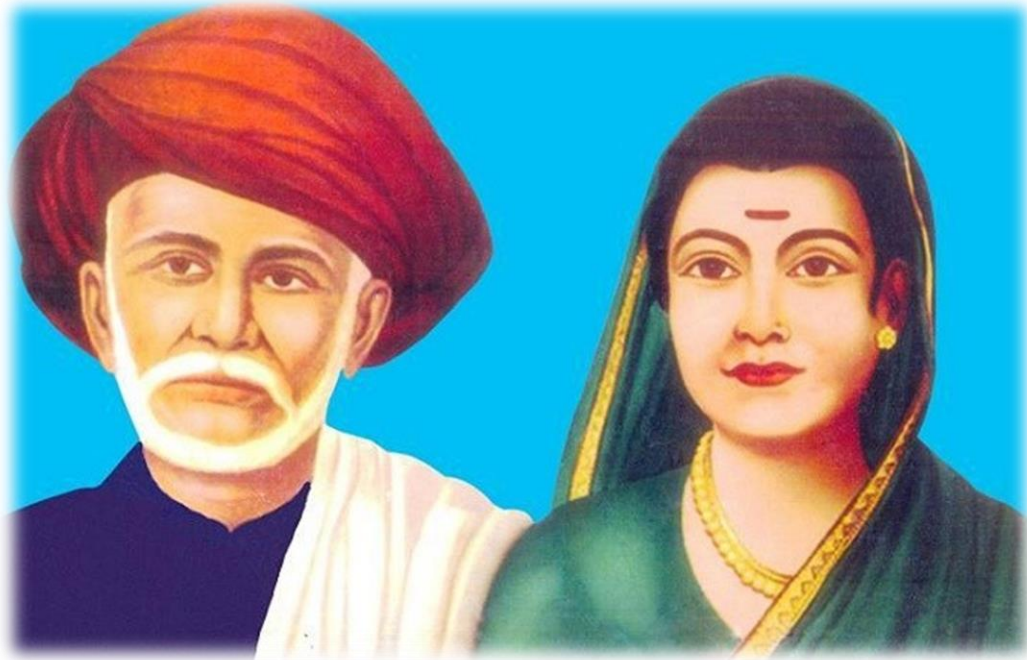


By 1851, Savitribai Phule along with her husband was running three schools with around 150 female students. For her, education was not simply alphabetical learning, but rather, an evolution of the mind itself. Her innovative methods of teaching slowly attracted the common people, as the number of girls increased.

1852

1852

Award From British Government



On 16th Nov. 1852, Phule family was honoured by the British government for their works in the field of education and Savitribai was declared as the best teacher.

1852

Started Mahila Seva Mandal



Savitribai Phule started Mahila Seva Mandal in 1852, which worked for raising women's consciousness about their human rights, the dignity of life and other social issues. She went on to organise a successful barbers strike in Mumbai and Pune against the prevailing practice of shaving of widows' heads.

1853

1853

Started India's First Infanticide Prohibition Home

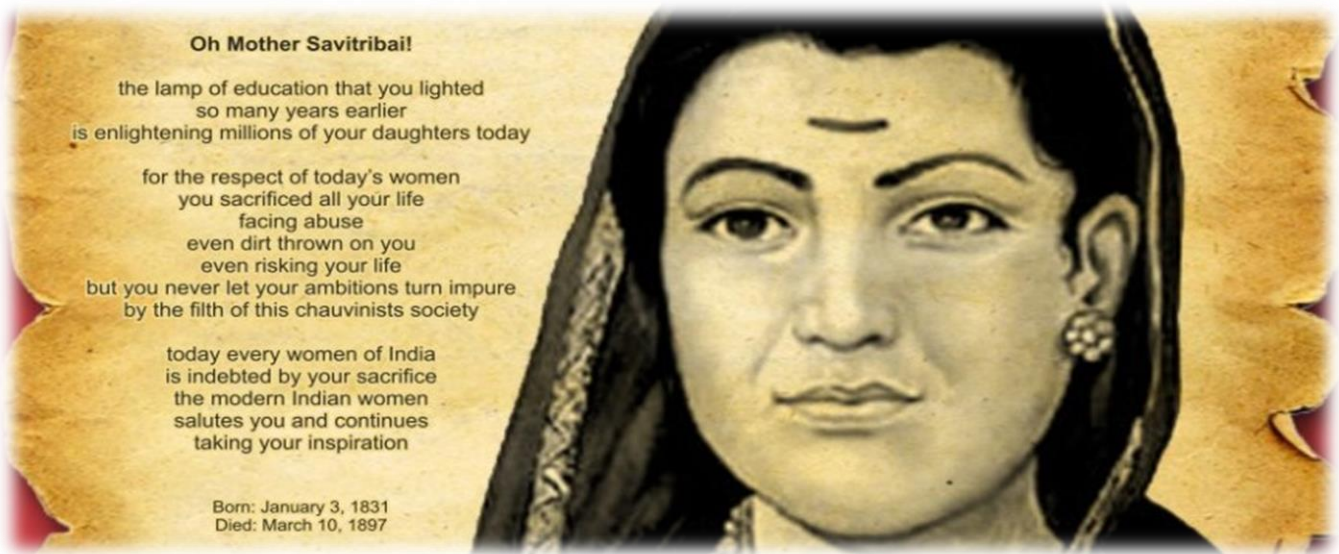


On 28 January 1853, the first-ever infanticide prohibition home of India was started by Savitribai Phule. Due to the Brahminical Social Order, those were the days when women irrespective of their caste and class were very much oppressed in all fields of life. There were many patriarchal and Brahminical traditions, values and rituals which were against women. There were a large number of widows in the Pune City and the nearby villages during days. Adolescents and young girls happened to more among in the widows. These widows were boycotted publicly and with the meagre financial support, they were clandestine subjects to sexual exploitation. They happened to be pregnant due to lack of contraceptives or other measures. So they had to be victimised for the reason for which they had not been responsible. Women had to lose their life due to unhealthy ways of abortion. Many newborns were been killed after delivery by widows to avoid social ostracism. Many times they had to leave their home. On 28 January 1853, Savitribai started a shelter for such women – Infanticide Prohibition Home – the first of its kind in India. In this Infanticide Prohibition Home, widows could give birth to their children and leave them there. Sixty-six women gave birth to their children in that shelter up to 1873. This was a great historical work that Savitribai did at that time – in the dark ages.

1854

1854

First Indian Woman Whose Poems Got Noticed



Savitribai Phule wrote many poems against discrimination and advised people to get educated. Savitribai Phule was the first Shudra women, in fact, the first Indian woman whose poems got noticed in the British empire. Savitribai Phule was the mother of modern poetry stressing the necessity of English and education through her poems. "Kavya Phule"- the first collection of poems was published in 1854. Read a few of her poems from "Kavyaphule" from here.

1855

1855

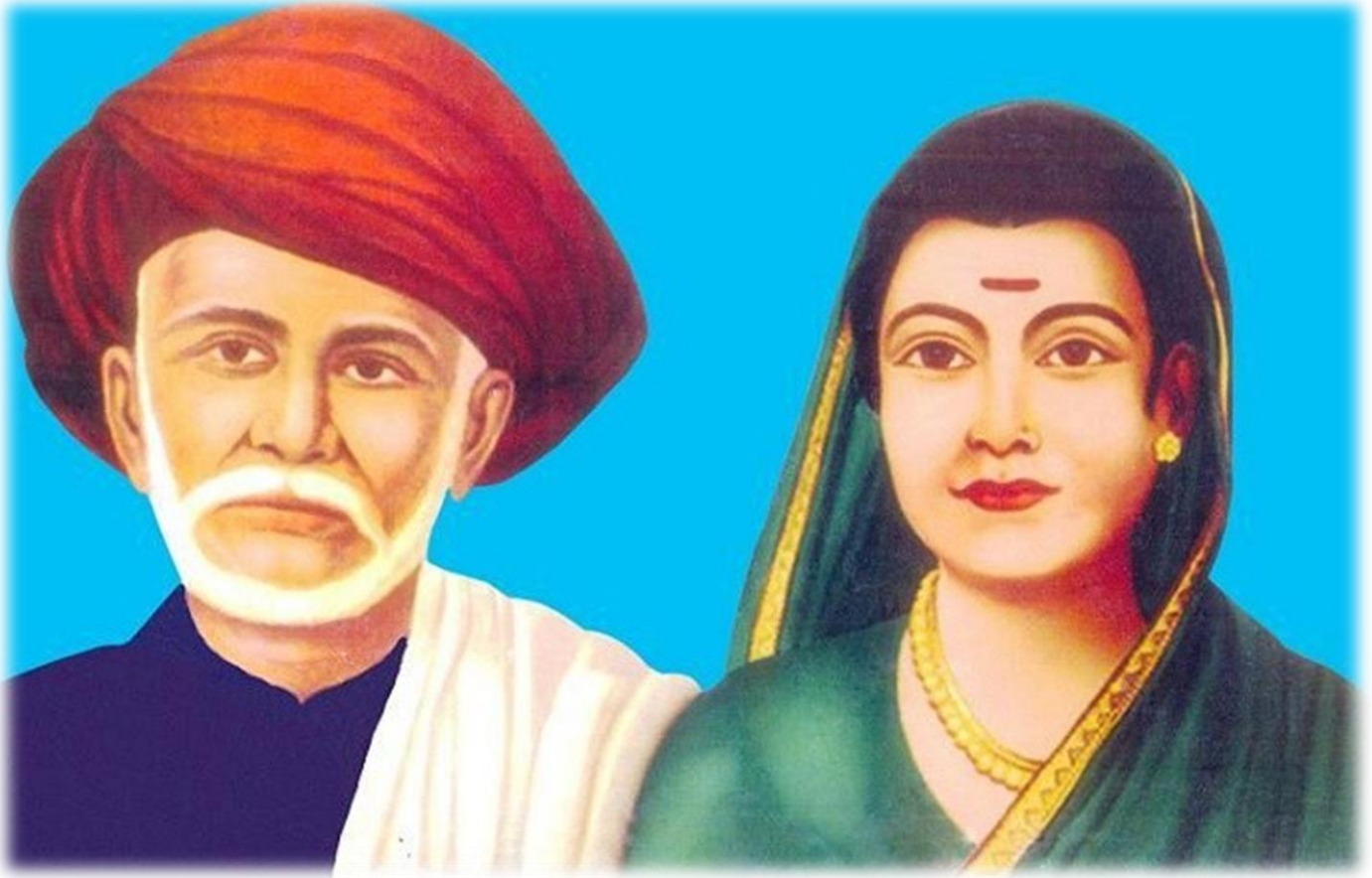
Started Night School



In 1855, a night school for agriculturist and labourers was started by Phule couple. There were many downtrodden people who had no option to go to regular schools but could themselves available only at night so to cater their needs Phule couple started the night school.

1855

Published Jyotirao Phule's Speeches

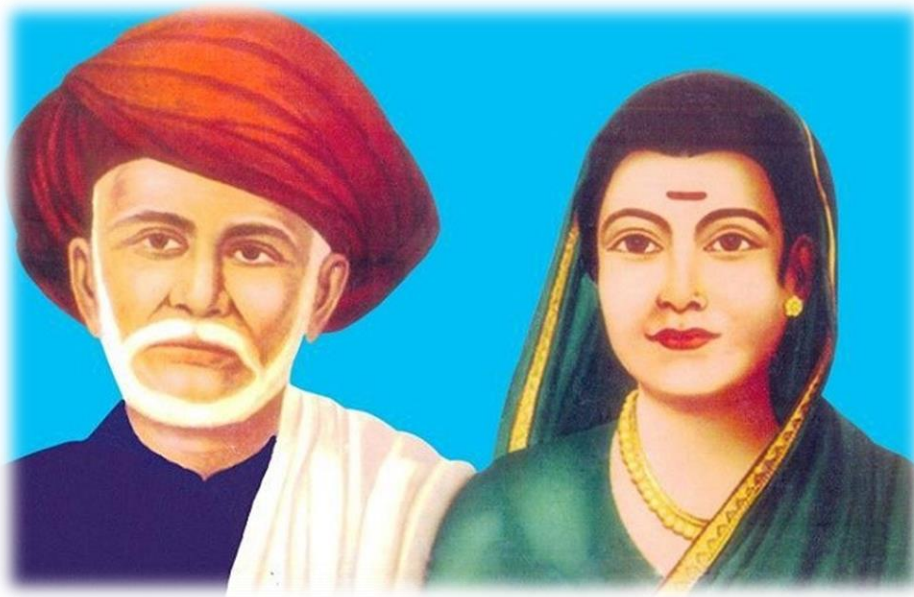


Savitribai Phule edited and published Jyotirao Phule's Speeches on 25 December 1856. It contains four speeches by Jyotirao Phule.

1863

1863

Started Orphanage Home



Phule couple started orphanage home for the pregnant widows in 1863 so that they can give birth to their children and live without the fear of society.

1868

1868

Opened the Well for Untouchables



**At a time when even the shadow of untouchables was considered impure
when the people were unwilling to offer water to thirsty untouchables,
Savitribai Phule and Mahatma Jotiba Phule opened the well in their house
for the use of untouchables. It was a challenge thrown at the
Brahmins to change their mindset towards untouchables
(But unfortunately, the sick mindset of so-called upper castes
have not changed even after almost 200 years,
Dalit (untouchables) still strive for water rights).**

1873

1873

Head of Satya Shodhak Samaj



When Jotiba Phule established the Satya Shodhak Samaj, Savitribai

became the head of the women's section which included ninety

female members. Moreover, she worked tirelessly as a school

teacher for girls. After Jotiba Phule's death, she was the

chairperson of Satya Shodhak Samaj and carried his work ahead.

Savitribai Phule acted as a Chairperson of Satya Shodhak

Samaj Conference at Saswad in 1893. Its purpose was to liberate

the Shudra and Untouchable castes from exploitation and oppression.

1874

1874

Adoption of Son



In 1874, Phule couple adopted the son of Kashibai, a Brahmin widow. When Infanticide Prohibition Home started by Savitribai Phule working as a hospital, Savitribai did not remain as one who served to widows but she went further in this regard. She adopted a child from a Brahmin widow (Kashibai) and thereby gave a message to the progressive people of the society. This adopted child was named Yashwant Rao, who later became a doctor.

1876

1876

Started 52 Free Food Hostels



During the 1876 to 1898 famines, Savitribai Phule worked courageously with her husband and suggested many new ways to overcome the difficult time. They started distributing free food at many locations. Phule couple started 52 free food hostels in Maharashtra.

1887

1887

Nursing Jotiba Phule



In July 1889, when Jyotiba Phule suffered a stroke and right side of the body was paralyzed, Savitribai nursed him night and day hence he managed to recover and write again.

1896

1896

Forced British Government to Start Relief Work



During the draught in 1897, Savitribai Phule forced British government, that was ignoring the well-being of people, to start relief work

1897

1897

Death of Savitribai Phule



Savitribai and her adopted son, Yashwant, opened a clinic to treat those affected by the bubonic plague when it appeared in the area around Nallasopara in 1897. Savitribai Phule personally took patients to the clinic where her son served them. While caring for the patients, she contracted the disease herself. She died from it on 10 March 1897 while serving a plague patient.

1983

1983

Memorial



Pune City Corporation built a memorial in the memory of Savitribai Phule in 1983.

1998

1998

Post Stamp in Honour

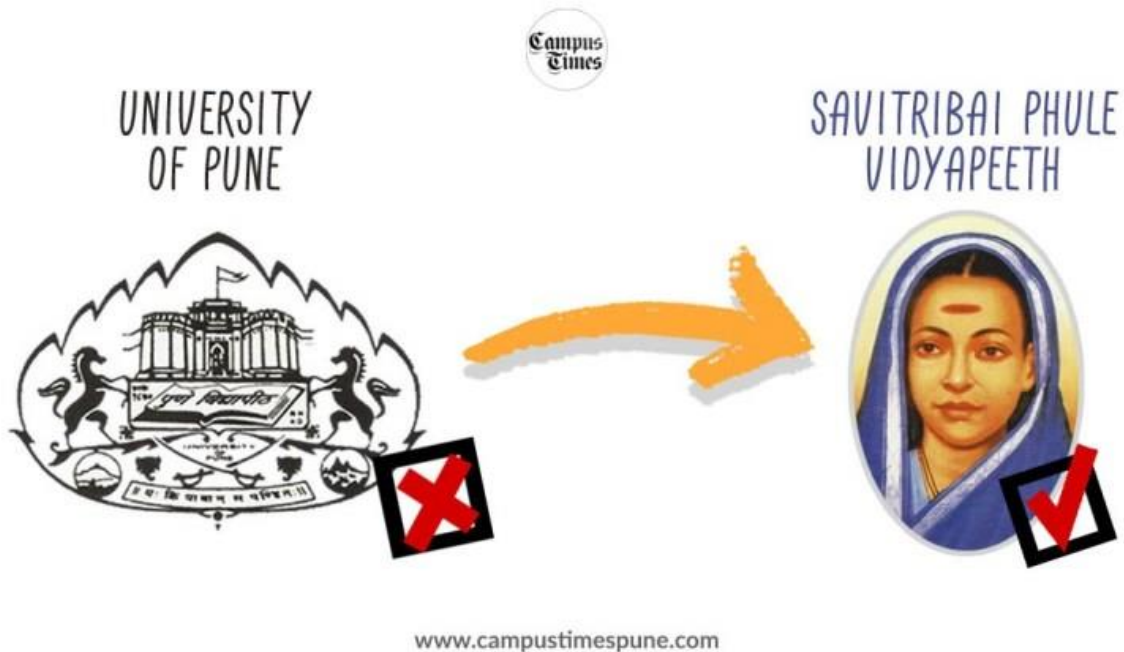


A century after her death, on 10 March 1998, a stamp was released by India Post in honour of Savitribai Phule.

2015

2015

University of Pune Renamed as Savitribai Phule Pune University



In 2015, the University of Pune was renamed as Savitribai Phule Pune University in her honour.

2017

2017

Savitribai Phule Google Doodle



On 3 January 2017, the search engine Google marked the 186th birth anniversary of Savitribai Phule with a Google doodle.

(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)(😊)



Selected Videos

[01] savitri bai fule | युगप्रवर्तक - सावित्रीबाई फुले./ Mahatma Jyotiba fule.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MnrZgUHto_I [1:25:39]

[02] Savitribai Phule | Ek Jyot Kranti ki | Latest Hindi Short Film 2018

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-qvgB1hUAY> [21:31]

[03] Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule - Ep #01 [22:54]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CaHSc-n05o>

[04] Bharat Ek Khoj | Episode-45 | Mahatma Phule [52:49]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAWOpkC3nhs>

[05] Satyashodhak (सत्यशोधक) - Superhit Full Marathi Natak

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h6MrUPQzvlo> [1:44:27]

[06] 'Haa ! Mai Savitribai Phule', solo play by veteran actress

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-N_0sjxz40 [1:17:04]



Savitribai Phule

The First Indian Feminist

<https://kartavyasadhana.in/view-article/savitribai-phule-first-feminist>



On the occasion of 189th birth anniversary of Great social reformer Savitribai Phule, Kartavya Sadhana is publishing a two-part series analysing the life and legacy of 'India's First Feminist'. Written by Sankalp Gurjar, the first part of the article will trace the life sketch of her and then it will move on towards her key ideas and her contribution to the cause of females' education. The second part of the article, which will be published tomorrow, examine her contribution to socio-religious reforms in India and also the immense effort she took in draught relief not once but twice. The article will conclude with brief introduction to her writings.

Nineteenth-century was a century of social reforms in India. Among the long list of social reformers and activists, a handful of Indian women like Pandita Ramabai, Savitribai Phule and Tarabai Shinde stand out. Savitribai Phule is perhaps the most important name in such a list. She was an outstanding woman not just for her times but remains so for our times as well. Due to the sheer range of activities in which she participated (and the underlying thinking behind it), she could well be considered as perhaps the first Indian feminist.

Bio-sketch

Savitribai was born in 1831 in a village near Pune in western India. As per the custom of her times, she was married off at the age of nine to the then thirteen-year-old Jotirao Phule. Phule was from a gardening caste and was living in the city of Pune. Along with Savitribai, Jotirao started the first school for educating women in India. Savitribai became first female teacher of that school in 1848 at the age of 17. Basically, when Carl Marx wrote his famous 'Communist Manifesto' in 1848, Phule couple was laying foundations for a social revolution in India. In starting a school for women, Phules were going against the then established social practices and religious dogma. Therefore, they faced stiff opposition not just from the outsiders but also from their own relatives.

Consequently, the couple had to leave their home and find a new house for themselves. Despite this resistance, Savitribai persisted. She not only taught in her own school but was instrumental in starting about 20 odd schools in and around the city of Pune in the next decade. In 1863, Savitribai was involved in another major effort launched by her husband. Jotirao and Savitribai started a home for unwanted widows and children. It was a radical action for those times and still remains so even now after 150 years. The couple had no children of their own. Hence they went on to adopt a child born in that home out of a widow for themselves. He was their only child and was trained as a doctor.

In the latter half of 1860's, Savitribai organized social gatherings of women from all castes. Another move that marked a radical departure from the past. In the caste dominated Indian social order, such gatherings were generally restricted to only people from one's own caste. Phules did not stop there. They went a step further. They opened their house water tank for all castes including for the so-called untouchables in 1868. It was a revolutionary step considering the times and place they lived in. Such a major step could not have been possible without the active support and encouragement from Savitribai at home.

Savitribai was also involved in the launching of Satya Shodhak Samaj (Truth Seeking Society) in 1873. Jotirao Phule was trying to break out of the then prevailing social order and religious orthodoxy. Formation of Satya Shodhak Samaj was a step further in that direction. It could be considered as the beginning of the non-Brahmin movement and a systematic attempt from below to challenge the supremacy of the upper castes. Savitribai was a founder member of the Samaj and was an active participant in the Samaj. First marriage in the Samaj was financed by Savitribai. She later presided over 20th session

of the Samaj in 1893 after Jotirao had died. She continued working with the Samaj till her death in 1897.

Savitribai was involved in two major drought relief efforts. In 1876-77, she participated along with Jotirao. In 1896-97, second major effort was launched by her at drought relief and helping victims of Plague. She herself succumbed to the Plague while working in a relief camp at the age of 66.

Key Ideas

This article primarily deals with Savitribai Phule. However, her work cannot be appreciated correctly without understanding the role of her husband, Jotirao Phule and the context in which the Phule couple worked. The Maratha Empire lost out to the British power in 1818 and a new era started. India's encounter with the British systems of civil and military administration, education and social life led to the fundamental rethinking about the Indian society and its current decaying state. Therefore, as a result, the movement for social reforms began to take shape. Jotirao Phule (1827-1890) belonged to the first generation of social reformers. He was born within a decade of the Maratha defeat. Jotirao was very active in the fields of socio-religious reforms, education and overall uplifting of downtrodden classes. Moreover, he wrote prolifically and his books in Marathi like Gulamgiri (Slavery) and Shetakaryancha Aasud (Hunter of Farmers) have proven as canonical texts for non-Brahmin movement. His work is so significant to the contemporary India that he is included by Ramachandra Guha in his list of Makers of Modern India.

Jotirao and Savitribai was a unique couple in the history of social and religious reforms movement of 19th century. Generally, social reformers of that time worked on their own without necessarily involving their spouses. Examples like Ram Mohan Roy and Lokhitvadi come to the mind. In case of spouses of social reformers like Ramabai Ranade (wife of Justice M G Ranade) charting their own course, it was mostly after the death of her husband that she went out and worked in the society. Savitribai stands out in this regard.

Phules are notable for not buckling under pressure and standing their own ground unlike many other reformers of the time. There is no other example similar to Jotirao and Savitribai of a couple working together in the social and religious reforms movement. Even now, it seems unusual. For their times, it was not just extraordinary but in all

probability a revolutionary thing to see a couple working hand in hand for the social causes.

Under the tutelage of the British rulers, an all-round transformation was taking place in India. Just like the nature of political power, Indian society and economy were changing gradually. British raj opened up, although limited, new possibilities of education, social status and jobs for hitherto oppressed and neglected classes. It is difficult to visualize someone like Jotirao and Savitribai rising from their caste background and making such an impact on society without the British imperial system. Phule's lifelong struggle to educate downtrodden classes, to provide an alternative understanding of the history and break out of traditional dominance of the upper castes has to be understood in this context. Savitribai was perhaps Jotirao's most able and intellectually convinced associate.

Savitribai and Jotirao were based in Pune and launched all of their major initiatives in the city. Pune then, as it is now, was an important city with vibrant intellectual circles. It was then home to a progressively inclined social and religious reforms movement on the one hand. On the other, it was a breeding ground for orthodox, anti-reforms activists as well. Jotirao with his modern education and radical ideas was naturally opposed to the religious orthodoxy and regressive social practices. He had revolutionary ideas about the society rooted in basic tenets of humanism. He was successful in imbibing those ideas in his bright and thinking wife's mind as well.

Jotirao and Savitribai's range of activities and depth of thinking (as seen in their writings and speeches) is an evidence of their intellectual capacities. Their half-a-century long active social life starts in 1848 and ends with the death of Savitribai in 1897. Savitribai's long career spanning five decades is one of the most remarkable careers of 19th century. In fact, Phules set out to change society at a very young age. Jotirao was only 21 and Savitribai 17 when they started their school for female education. In the subsequent sections, we will briefly take a look at some of the major ideas and events of Savitribai's life and times. In the process, we will highlight Savitribai's contribution and perhaps resurrect a place for her in the discourse of south Asian thinkers.

Female Education

In the age of old and oppressive caste system, women were denied the most basic rights including education. Their condition was pathetic on all social counts and remained so

for hundreds of years. Even though Brahmin caste was allowed to take part in education, Brahmin women were deprived of education. In case of other castes, the situation was much worse. Jotirao Phule had realized that most fundamental problem of society was the lack of access to education. Having educated himself, he knew the importance of education. He was connected with the world (as could be seen in him dedicating his book to the American thinker Thomas Paine) and was equally determined to change the situation of Indian society. He started out from his house itself. He first taught his wife, Savitribai, to read and write at home. Then he properly trained her to be a teacher.

Going further, with the help of Savitribai, Jotirao decided to launch a school to educate women. It was open for all sections of society including Dalits and Muslims. In addition to the reluctance of parents to send girls to school, they found it difficult to recruit teachers from outside. It was believed that educating girls was forbidden by religious texts. It was also not a prevailing social custom in those times. By breaking away from the then prevailing social and religious common sense, Jotirao was challenging society and religion at the same time. In this difficult yet necessary endeavour, Savitribai was his staunch ally. She not only supported his initiative but also participated in it actively. She became the first teacher and principal of the school.

Thus, the first school for female in India started in 1848. In the next few years, the couple worked tirelessly to run the school and form schools in other parts in and around Pune. They drew praise from the British officials for their work and were felicitated as well. Results of their school were better than the government-run schools. In parts of Maharashtra, British missionaries were running schools as well. However, such missionary schools were of little help in educating Indian women. Rather, due to the fear of religious conversion, Indian society was in general wary of their intentions and activities. Savitribai's school was the first one to be run by and for Indians (girls).

Savitribai faced immense difficulties from all corners of society. While going to the school, in addition to the verbal abuse, stones, cow dung and garbage was thrown at her. Phule couple had to leave their house and find a new home for themselves. But she persisted without wavering in the face of such challenges. They faced financial difficulties as well. To run the school seamlessly, Phules used to work long hours sometimes even missing their meals. They were intellectually convinced that whatever they were doing is right. That it was in the larger and long-term interest of the society. (This article is a revised version of the paper presented at Delhi University in 2017)

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<https://www.newsclick.in/savitribai-phule-strong-voice-womens-rights-against-conservatism-and-patriarchy>

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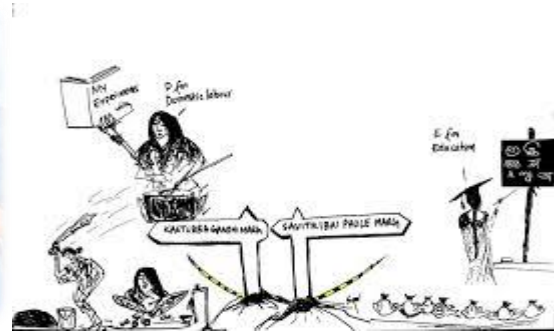
<https://historified.in/2024/05/10/savitribai-phule-introduction-to-feminism-women-education-and-reformations/>

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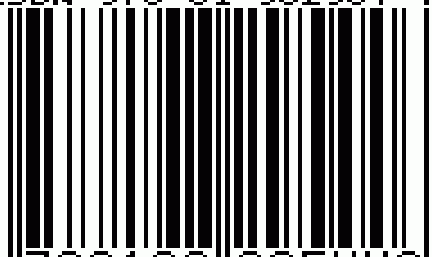
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